



## **Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks**

Region One  
490 North Meridian Rd.  
Kalispell, MT 59901  
(406) 752-5501  
FAX: 406-257-0349  
Ref:DV127-04  
September 1, 2004

TO: Governor's Office, Attn: Todd O'Hair, PO Box 200801, Helena, 59620-0801  
Environmental Quality Council, PO Box 201704, Helena, 59620-1704  
\*Dept. of Environmental Quality, Planning, Prevention & Assistance, PO Box 200901, Helena, 59620-0901  
\*Dept. of Environmental Quality, Permitting Compliance, PO Box 200901, Helena, 59620-0901  
DNRC, PO Box 201601, Helena, 59620-1601; \*Kalispell: Jon Dahlberg  
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks - Director's Office: Reg Peterson; Parks: Walt Timmerman, Allan Kuser; Legal Unit: Brandi Fisher  
\*SHPO, PO Box 201202, Helena, 59620-1202  
\*Montana State Library, 1515 East Sixth Ave., Helena, 59620-1800 (e-mailed)  
Jim Jensen, Montana Environmental Information Center, PO Box 1184, Helena, 59624  
George Ochenski, PO Box 689, Helena, 59624  
Wayne Hirst, Montana State Parks Foundation, PO Box 728, Libby, 59923  
Montana State Parks Association, PO Box 699, Billings, 59103  
Joe Gutkoski, President, Montana River Action Network, 304 N 18<sup>th</sup> Ave., Bozeman, 59715  
Rep. Bernie Olson, 161 Lakeside Blvd., Lakeside, 59922  
Rep. Stanley Fisher, 76 Golf Terrace Drive, Bigfork, 59911-6252  
Sen. Bob Keenan, Box 697, Bigfork, 59911-0697  
Flathead County Commissioners, 800 S Main Street, Kalispell, 59901  
Lake County Commissioners, 106 Fourth Avenue E, Polson, 59860  
Flathead County Library, 247 First Avenue E, Kalispell, 59901  
Flathead County Library, 521 Electric Avenue, Bigfork, 59911

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP), Region One, has completed an environmental assessment (EA) for Wayfarers State Park for the purpose of completing a forestry project involving removal of hazardous trees; opening the understory to promote health of ponderosa pine; reducing stress on trees due to competition for light, water, and nutrients; and reducing fuel loads.

A copy of the decision document is enclosed, with Alternative C – completing the forester's prescription as recommended – being the preferred alternative. There were no changes to the draft EA; therefore, the draft becomes the final EA and may be viewed at or obtained from FWP, Region One, 490 N. Meridian Road, Kalispell, MT 59901. Please direct questions or comments to Marty Watkins, Regional Parks Manager, 490 North Meridian Road, Kalispell, MT 59901, or e-mail to [mawatkins@state.mt.us](mailto:mawatkins@state.mt.us).

Sincerely,

Daniel P. Vincent  
Regional Supervisor

/ni

Enclosures: 2

c: Jo & Larry Clayton, Harry Wood, Galen Matney, Brett Thuma, Ian MacCallum, John Shannahan, & Robert Dolan

Decision Notice  
and  
Finding of No Significant Impact  
for  
Wayfarers Forestry Project  
Environmental Assessment

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks  
Region 1  
490 N. Meridian Road  
Kalispell, MT 59901

September 1, 2004

Description of the Proposed Action:

The purpose of this project is to complete a forestry project at Wayfarers State Park. The objective is to maintain the property over time for safe public use, with a forest cover that is healthy, and fire and wind resistant. In consideration of fire behavior, tree crowns that are not touching will provide a crown-fire-resistant stand or community of trees. A healthy stand, with a mixture of tree species native to the site, with a diversity of tree sizes and ages, is the desired future condition. The long-term goal is to restore the site to the historic stand structure of large, open, park-like stands dominated by ponderosa pine, with some Douglas fir. The specific objectives of this project will be:

1. To remove hazardous, diseased, and dead or dying trees.
2. To open the understory to promote the health of ponderosa pine.
3. Reduce stress on trees due to competition for light, water, and nutrients. That stress is resulting in increasing mortality due to the combined effects of dwarf mistletoe, root rot, and bark beetles.
4. To reduce fuel loads, ladder fuels, and the possibility of crown fires in order to protect the park and adjacent private lands.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks proposed to follow the prescription written by Fred Hodgeboom, a forester hired to assess the forest and complete the prescription. That prescription is attached to this decision notice.

Public Comment:

The environmental assessment was published in the local paper and posted on the FWP Web site. Neighbors adjacent to Wayfarers were contacted by mail and informed of the project, as were environmental groups that might have had interest in the project. A walk-through of the project and public meeting was held on August 5, 2004. Six people attended the meeting.

While there was general agreement that some type of management action needed to take place, concern was expressed that the aesthetics of Wayfarers be considered, that all slash and downed materials be removed, and that as little of the understory as possible be disturbed. In order to accommodate these concerns, it was agreed that the people that

attended the meeting would be notified in September when the entire project is ribboned off, and another walk-through would be held. It was further agreed that FWP would contract with an arborist, who would meet with the forester under contract to look at the project to ensure that aesthetics are considered.

Four comments were received. Two supported the project as submitted; two could support the project with the above conditions being met.

#### Finding of No Significant Impact:

Based on the analysis in the environmental assessment (EA), I find Alternative C – completing the forester’s prescription as recommended – to be the preferred alternative. I have evaluated the EA and applicable laws, regulations, and policies and have determined that this action will not have a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

The final environmental assessment and the FONSI may be viewed at or obtained from Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Region One, 490 N. Meridian Road, Kalispell, MT 59901. Please direct requests and questions to:

Marty Watkins, Regional Parks Manager  
Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
490 N. Meridian Road  
Kalispell, MT 59901  
(406) 752-5501  
mawatkins@state.mt.us

In accordance with FWP policy, an appeal may be made by any person who has either commented in writing to the department on the proposed project, or who has registered or commented orally at a public meeting held by the department on the proposed project, or who can provide new evidence that would otherwise change the proposed plan. An appeal must be submitted to the Director of FWP in writing and must be postmarked or received within 30 days of this decision notice. The appeal must describe the basis for the appeal, how the appellant has previously commented to the department or participated in the decision making process, and how the department can provide relief. The appeal should be mailed to: Director, Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 1420 East 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Helena, MT 59620.

---

Daniel P. Vincent  
Regional Supervisor

---

Date

## WAYFARERS STATE PARK FOREST HEALTH AND FIRE HAZARD REDUCTION PRESCRIPTION

**LOCATION:** Wayfarers State Park, approximately 60 acres, is located about one mile south of Bigfork, Montana, located between Montana Hwy 35 and Flathead Lake, S1/2, SE1/4 Sec. 36, T27N, R20W, Flathead County, Montana.

**DESIRED FUTURE CONDITION (GOAL):** The MT Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (DFWP) desires to maintain the property over time for safe public use, with a forest cover that is healthy, and fire and wind resistant. Large, mature trees are desired as the general forest cover over time. Tree crowns and root systems need adequate site resources (sun, water, soil nutrients) in order to resist insect and disease attack. Tree crowns that are not touching will have adequate site resources to grow and remain healthy as well as providing a crown-fire-resistant stand or community of trees. A healthy stand will have a mixture of tree species native to the site. There will be some diversity of tree sizes and ages on the site to provide replacements as some large trees die over time. A long-term goal is to restore the site to the historic stand structure of large, open, park-like stands dominated by ponderosa pine, with some Douglas fir.

**EXISTING CONDITION:** Existing stands are characterized by lack of disturbance for several decades resulting in dense, overcrowded stands dominated by Douglas fir with lots of dwarf mistletoe infection. Competition for light, water, and nutrients is at a maximum in these stands. Result is stress and increasing mortality due to the combined effects of dwarf mistletoe, root rot, and bark beetles. Douglas fir bark beetles are rapidly increasing and may continue due to big broods hatching out of the recent large fires and continuing drought.

Dwarf mistletoe is a parasitic plant that takes root and feeds off the host tree. Each dwarf mistletoe species is adapted to infect only a single species of tree. The presence of the parasite causes abnormal growth of clusters of small branches (often called witches brooms) and swollen knots and burls on the trunk and branches of infected trees. The parasite is spread by a sticky seed that ejects only a few feet from the mature pod. Therefore, it spreads very slowly. Birds may also spread the seed. The mistletoe does not kill the host tree, but it saps some of the nutrients and water from the host, and if the infection is heavy, may weaken the tree and predispose the tree to other insect and disease infections. The witches' brooms collect more wind, snow, and ice loads in the winter, and the abnormal grain or burl at the base of the infection weakens the strength of the wood, resulting in the brooms being broken off or tops broken out of trees. The Douglas fir witches' brooms, whether in the tree or on the ground, contribute flash fuels and increase fire hazard in heavily infected stands.

Root rot is caused by a fungus that kills the roots of a tree, often killing the tree by weakening it so that it is vulnerable to bark beetle attack and windthrow. Douglas fir is especially prone to several species of root rot. Root rot also makes the tree less resistant to wind load, and thus hazardous for users in recreational areas.

Douglas fir bark beetle is a beetle adapted to specifically attack Douglas fir. The bark beetle can detect which Douglas fir trees are under stress by the organic compounds evaporating from the tree. Zeroing in on stressed trees (deprived of water by the effects of dwarf mistletoe, root rot, and drought), hundreds of adult beetles bore into the tree and tunnel between the bark and wood while laying eggs. The eggs hatch and thousands of grub worms begin to feed on the cambium of the tree. The adult beetles and larval galleries girdle the tree and deprive the crown of food and water, thus killing the tree.

Douglas fir are exceptionally vulnerable to the combined effects of dwarf mistletoe, root rot, bark beetles, and drought. It is usually difficult to attribute the cause of death to a single pathogen or cause. Multiple agents of change are almost always present. Competition for site resources from excess Douglas fir is stressing the surviving ponderosa pine causing them to be more vulnerable to bark beetle attack. In addition to the wide array of pests affecting Douglas fir, lower limbs persist long after they die from lack of sun, providing a ladder of dead limbs that allows a fire to easily spread into the thick upper crowns. Stands with heavy composition of Douglas fir are more prone to severe crown fires than stands of ponderosa pine and larch. When Native American and natural fires burned valley sites like Wayfarers regularly, these same traits caused the fires to kill the young Douglas fir and favored the survival of ponderosa pine and larch. Ponderosa pine and larch are more resistant to all of the agents of change than Douglas fir, so they are better choices for recreation-site tree cover.

The biological factors described above are resulting in accumulating ground fuels at Wayfarers due to weather breakage; mistletoe weakened, abnormally branched trees; and dense tree crowns capable of carrying catastrophic crown fires. These stand conditions, and the density of Douglas fir under and around surviving ponderosa pine, are prevalent between the improvements at the lakeshore and the Harry Horn picnic area improvements on the east end of the park. In severe burning conditions, a fire start near the lakeshore south of the park or within the park could rapidly develop into a crown fire threatening the Harry Horn developed site and adjacent private property, as well as killing all remaining ponderosa pine, which are normally fire resistant.

**SITE SPECIFIC PRESCRIPTION:** The existing tree crowns must be thinned out to reduce the possibility of fire racing from crown to crown, and ground fuels must be reduced. This can be accomplished by thinning the stand between the boat launch parking lot and the access road above the Harry Horn parking lot to a tree spacing of 20-30 feet between these mature trees (see attached map).

First priority will be to leave existing ponderosa pine and concentrate on removing as much mistletoe-infected Douglas fir as possible. This will give the best trees increased light, water, and nutrients they need to resist insect and disease attack and become more resistant to wind.

Thinning to release healthy ponderosa pine will be the secondary objective. To increase diversity, at least one or two surviving veteran, old-growth ponderosa pine or just a good mature tree will be selected, and harvest of all the competing Douglas fir for a radius of 50-75 feet around the maternal pine will be done. This will open spaces for new ponderosa pine to germinate and/or to be planted in order to maintain a mixed-age class into the future. Ponderosa must have nearly full sunlight to germinate and grow. Sound snags that are not a safety hazard will be left standing for bird habitat.

The ponderosa pines around the lakeshore facilities are currently in good condition.

**IMPLEMENTATION:** The treatment will be implemented through a commercial thinning timber sale, specifying mechanical harvesters and transport of logs and slash to designated loading or disposal areas. The commercial thinning will take place in the winter when the ground is frozen to minimize ground and vegetative disturbance. Native grass seeds will be sewn in all areas of ground disturbance. Stumps will be cut to ground level in all areas with heavy recreational traffic. Stumps in undisturbed areas of the park may be left. The commercial value of the excess trees on the site should cover the cost of completely disposing of the slash resulting from the harvested trees as well as the natural accumulation of excess ground fuels. The leave trees will be marked in late September or early October with orange ribbons by a professional forester. The stand marked for thinning will be available for public review prior to seeking bids.

The thinning and slash disposal operation will be conducted in one of the following alternatives in order of desirability, with the final decision based on financial feasibility, and environmental and recreational impacts:

- A. Thin, chip, and haul all slash from site in winter (January/February 2005) with snow and frozen ground (Stone Container has such equipment).
- B. Thin and progressively burn the slash during the open burning season in October 2004 or March 2005 using a burning boat.
- C. Thin and progressively burn the slash during the open burning season in October 2004 or March 2005 using 2-4 designated burning spots.
- D. Thin and pile the slash in 2-4 designated burning spots in winter to be burned during the March 2005 open burning period.

The above specifications will be sent to several Montana Logging Association-accredited loggers soliciting bids on the thinning job. Bidder will submit an Operation Plan specifying proposed slash disposal methods and equipment to be used. The successful bidder will be awarded based on evaluation of his operating plan as well as a stumpage price, if any. Any excess value of the trees removed over costs will go to the Real Property Trust. The interest from the Real Property Trust is used for Fish, Wildlife & Parks Operations and Maintenance.

Submitted by: Fred D. Hodgeboom, Forester